

Diverse economy has ranged from farming to shipbuilding

By Donna MacLearn
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DUXBURY — Most residents today commute to Boston or Plymouth to work, unlike the town's earlier inhabitants, who looked locally to the land, sea or small trades for their livelihoods.

The first colonists by necessity were farmers. Duxbury was settled

around 1628 when the Second Land Grant in Plymouth County provided every man with 20 acres for himself and 20 for each member of his family.

Today, passersby still can see sheep, cattle and horses grazing on small farms around town, primarily in north and west Duxbury. There also are tree farms and cranberry bogs.

Cranberries were used as food and

medicine by the settlers. Later, ship captains would carry barrels of cranberries on voyages to prevent scurvy, said E. Waldo Long in his book titled *The Story of Duxbury 1637-1937*.

By 1937 there were about 25 people cultivating hundreds of acres of cranberry bogs. They produced about 36,000 bushels annually at an estimated value of \$120,000, he said.

The first grist mill was built in Duxbury in 1640 on the Duck Hill River in the area now known as Millbrook. More grist mills, a fulling mill, saw mills, and a Keen family mill that made shingles followed.

Wooden pumps were manufactured briefly, and carriages, wagons and harnesses were made in town. Thomas Prence opened the first shipyard next to Captain's Hill around 1719.

In 1764, 21-year-old Ezra Weston bought a shipyard and began building the biggest vessels in Duxbury. Eventually, one of the largest ship-owners in the world, he was dubbed "King Caesar."

At their peak, the Westons ran a general store, wharf, shipping vessels, sail loft, farms and a forge. In 1833 the first bank was established with Ezra Weston II as president.

In 1837, 71 ships were built in Duxbury and about 900 men, almost a third of the population, were working in the shipping industry, Long said. Forges in town shaped iron and brass into anchors and ship fittings.

Several small tinsmith shops in Tinkertown made lanterns and

kitchenware. Tinkertown also became the town's shoemaking center. Mariners sometimes turned to shoemaking during the winter months at home and when the shipping industry declined.

"In 1837, Duxbury shops produced more than 42,000 pairs of shoes and 1,000 pairs of boots, the combined value of which was nearly \$56,000," Long wrote. As the Civil War neared, sewing machines began to encroach on the work previously done by individual shoemaking shops.

Fishing played a part in the town's economic development. In 1837 about 50 fishing boats sailed from Duxbury to the Georges and Grand banks for mostly cod and mackerel.

Saltworks produced salt for the fisheries, which packed the cod in boxes and mackerel in barrels and sent most of it to the West Indies and Europe. Duxbury once had a pogie factory at the base of Captain's Hill where fish were turned into fertilizer, resident Alison Arnold said recently.

The town expressed opposition to the business in 1885, and numerous complaints about the odor from the factory preceded its eventual closing, she said. Shellfishing was introduced to the early settlers by the Indians, and clam shells were used in road building, Arnold said.

The first planting of clams in the bay was done in 1869. By 1898 all major digging was stopped because of the crop's rapid depletion.

In 1934, 8,000 bushels of shellfish were marketed. Today, about 30 shellfishermen farm the flats and

about 20 lobstermen call Duxbury home port, said Harbormaster and Shellfish Warden Donald Beers.

Last fall, for the second year in a row, the public was able to harvest oysters after he stocked the bay. Today's shellfish harvesters also can find quahogs, mussels, razor clams, sea clams and soft-shell clams.

"Our goal is to have enough shellfish resources so we won't need to limit the harvesting seasons," Beers said.

Also on the waterfront is one of the town's largest employers: the Battelle marine laboratory on Washington Street. Of its 160 employees, 140 are scientists, said Joan Sundstrom, manager of personnel and information services.

Scientist William Clapp established Clapp Laboratories in the 1930s and in 1964 his Duxbury facility was purchased by Battelle Memorial Institute. Clapp once had his laboratory on a schooner tied up to a Boston wharf, according to Long.

Another large town employer is the Bay Path Nursing and Rehabilitation Center on Kings Town Way (Route 53). But the largest current employer is the town, which provides jobs for 377 full-time employees, 90-part-timers, and 275 seasonal or intermittent workers at the town offices and schools.

The former Ford Store established in 1826 at Millbrook is believed to have been New England's first department store. It was destroyed by fire in 1921.